

## October 25, 2007 - Slaughter Supports Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act

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I stand before you here on the House floor with mixed emotions. I, along with a majority of Members of the House, are disappointed that we are forced to reintroduce a bill - passed by enormous bipartisan support - which would have provided millions of children across the nation with access to healthcare.

The memory of what took place here on the House floor one week ago today will not soon be forgotten. On that day, we saw a few Members stand in lockstep with the President and with that deny health care coverage for millions of children.

However, coupled with my disappointment, M. Speaker, is the consuming feeling of promise.

I have hope for those children, along with the belief that those Members who were unable to break away from the President's mistaken rhetoric will stand for what is right today, and vote to overwhelmingly pass this vital legislation.

I feel strongly that what motivated me and so many of my colleagues to come to Washington in the first place was the thought that, on any day, a vote could be held that would improve the lives of millions of people throughout our country.

And that is exactly the chance that we have been given here today.

We are again granted the chance to vote for a bill that will advance medical care in this country, improve the health of our youngest citizens, and offer new hope and help for literally millions of children who would otherwise be left without either.

I think that everyone listening today recognizes the reality of the situation we face. Should we not act, the health care of millions of children will be yanked away on November 16th. Not providing health care to millions of children when given the opportunity to do so is appalling. But to strip away benefits from those who currently have them is simply indefensible.

M. Speaker, in our vote to expand SCHIP last month, we made a genuine dent in one of the most shameful inadequacies of our health care system: the lack of coverage for millions of America's children.

Congress created the State Child Health Insurance Program in 1997 with broad bipartisan support, including some of my colleagues who now oppose it, and as a result over six million children currently have health care coverage that otherwise would not. In my home state of New York, over 400,000 children are enrolled - the second highest in the nation.

This SCHIP reauthorization bill would preserve access to health care for 6 million children already enrolled in the program, while bringing desperately needed health coverage to almost 4 million children. And as a result, in my home state of New York an additional 268,000 children will have health care coverage. That means they'll be able to get their immunizations before starting school or see the dentist when they have a toothache.

And this new bill also makes changes by phasing out childless adults after one year, while also putting in a cap on children whose parents incomes are over 300% above the poverty level. In addition, the bill also requires states to develop plans and implement recommended best practices for addressing crowd-out.

Make no mistake, 43 Governors from states red and blue, 69 members of the United States Senate, Democrats and Republicans, 273 of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle in the House, and 81% of the American public, including a large majority of Republicans, support our bi-partisan expansion of SCHIP.

Yet, presented with this overwhelming support from all sides, the President decided to dust off his veto pen, and with it deny millions of children access to health care.

In spite of the unquestionable benefits, and in spite of the overwhelming popularity and accomplishments of this program, SCHIP is under attack.

We saw reprehensible smear attacks on families who were brought into the public eye to showcase the benefits of this program. In the face of the life saving chance that was bestowed on the family due to this program, the harshest rhetoric was not cast against the bill, but against this family, including the children.

We saw persons go to the home of one of the families and harass them in public, talk radio and blogs making wild and audacious accusations, and we even saw staffers on Capitol Hill who clearly intended to assist this fabricated, cold-hearted smear campaign.

It is simply beyond comprehension to me that many are willing to score political points by denigrating our nation's

children - particularly those who owe their very lives to this program.

But the American people saw through their smear attacks. They understand that the health of our nation's children is simply not worth scoring a few political points.

M. Speaker, the President chastises the \$35 billion bill - which is fully paid for - as "too expensive." And with the same breath, he seeks an additional \$190 billion for the Iraq War - all of which is at the expense of the taxpayer.

This is simply unconscionable when you realize that the amount of money it takes to provide health coverage to 10 million children for an entire year is what we spend in Iraq in just 41 days.

We must get our priorities straight.

I am enormously proud of the accomplishments that we can credit to this Democratic-led Congress. From education to healthcare, from national security to increasing the minimum wage, enormous strides have been taken and challenges have been met to make our country stronger, healthier, and better prepared for what lies ahead.

The American people expect us to tackle the health care challenge before us.

Last week, we fell short of overturning the President's veto by just 13 votes. To those Members who know that providing health care to vulnerable children is the right thing to do - I say to you: join with Democrats, with Republicans, and with the American people in passing this bill today.

Healthy children make a healthy nation, M. Speaker. I hope every Member takes a long and hard look at the bill that we are presenting today, and sees not just the words and the numbers, but the faces of the 10 million children whose fate they hold in their hands.

It is time to put principles before politics.

It is time to stand in defiance of misplaced priorities.

And it is time, M. Speaker, to vote with our nation's children and provide them with the health care they need and

deserve.

I reserve the balance of my time.